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3 U.S. carrier forces to hold maneuvers off Libya

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WASHINGTON — The United States is deploying three aircraft carrier task forces in the Mediterranean north of Libya and has given notice that it will conduct flight operations in the region over the next two days, it was disclosed last night.

The massing of ships and aircraft was seen as a resumption of the war of nerves that has been waged intermittently against Col. Muammar el Kaddafi's Libya throughout this year.

The U.S. government began the challenges to Colonel Kaddafi after linking Libya to the December terrorist attacks on airports in Vienna, Austria, and Rome, and after failing to get European countries to join in economic sanctions against Libya.

Cmdr. Richard Schram, a Pentagon spokesman, said that the civil air traffic control center in Tripoli, Libya, had been notified that ship and aircraft operations would be conducted between 7 a.m. EST today and 7 p.m. tomorrow.

With approximately 30 warships on the scene, the Navy has the largest and most potent force it has deployed in the Mediterranean for many months, possibly for some years.

Sources who discussed the operation would not say whether naval aircraft or warships would operate south of 32 degrees 30 minutes north latitude, the line across the top of the Gulf of Sidra which Colonel Kaddafi claims is all Libyan territorial waters. This country and others recognize only a 12-mile limit and con-

tend the rest of the gulf is an international waterway.

The naval force included equipment for detecting and destroying sites where the Libyans have Soviet-supplied anti-aircraft missile launchers, should attempts be made to use those missiles against U.S. aircraft.

Neither the White House nor State Department would comment on a claim by CBS News that the naval forces would cross the 32 degrees 30 minutes line, which Colonel Kaddafi calls the "line of death."

Commander Schram said the naval operation "should be characterized as non-provocative and routine." The Navy does not routinely mobilize three aircraft task forces in the Mediterranean Sea. Normally, it has one or two.

In the present case, the carrier Saratoga, deployed since last August, was due to be relieved by the America, which was scheduled to be on its Mediterranean station today.

The Saratoga will remain for the time being. The third carrier is the Coral Sea. In all, naval sources said, the force can put as many as 245 aircraft of all types in the air. These include A-6, A-7 and F/A-18 aircraft fitted to drop bombs, and F-14s equipped to deal with any Russian-built planes with which Libya might attack.

The Soviets were reported to have about half a dozen warships in the Mediterranean at the moment. A submarine tender that doubles as an eavesdropping ship to give information to the Libyans was reported at anchor off Libya.